In the Name of God

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It is a movie all Pakistanis must see; an incisive story-telling of the relationship of the west with Islam and the rest of the world. Acclaimed Pakistani filmmaker Shoaib Mansoor has the guts to explode myths about Islam spread, often with far-reaching consequences, by fundamentalist maulvis who preach false theories about music and art barred in Islam.

In *Khuda Ke Liye* (In The Name Of God), he takes a story that uses music as its language, metaphor and central character. This enriches the film's message as well as its aesthetics. Mansoor (Shaan) and Sarmad (Fawad Khan) are noted pop musicians in Lahore, Pakistan, brought up in an affluent and liberal Muslim family. Sarmad, taken in by the local Maulvi's preaching, gives up music, grows a beard, sheds his trousers to wear the kurta-pyjama-headgear and asks his mother to wear the hijab. All attempts to correct him fail.

Mariam (Iman Ali) or Mary, their first cousin, is born and brought up in London. She is in love with a British classmate but her father is against it even though he is in a long live-in relationship with a British woman. He betrays his daughter's trust by bringing her to Pakistan on the plea of 'meeting the family' but tricks her into a forced marriage to Sarmad in distant Waziristan, a lost, desolate and arid place in Afghanistan just across the border. He leaves her there to rot in the desert with a few kind, but ignorant women of different ages who have never been out of their huts all their lives.

Mansoor leaves for Chicago to train in music. He falls in love and marries his American classmate but 9/11 happens just then, to break his life into pieces inside an American torture chamber. When he comes out, he has turned into a human vegetable who just begins to respond to music when the film closes. Mariam wins a court case against the group that is trying to take custody of her baby thanks to an Islamic scholar (Naseeruddin Shah) who quotes at length from Islam's religious scriptures in court to set things right.

Do Pakistani courts allow such lengthy discourses in the courtroom? Mariam's choosing to go back to Waziristan with a baby in tow to teach her illiterate friends how to read and write is far-fetched and melodramatic. Shaan as Mansoor fulfills the faith his director places on him because his character contains almost every shade of the emotional spectrum. Fawad Khan, as his led-astray brother is wooden at places while Iman Ali as Mariam mesmerises with her screen presence but could do with some more polish in her acting.



Famous Indian actor Naseeruddin Shah plays the character of Maulana Wali, while Pakistani actor Rasheed Naz plays the role of Maulana Tahiri.

There is too much Urdu in the dialogues of the maulvi and the Islamic scholar and without sub-titles, they tend to fall flat on ears that do not understand Urdu. The other drawback of this otherwise thought-provoking and incisive attack on Islamic fundamentalism is its endless footage of 167 minutes that drags the ending. Who is fighting whom in Waziristan is another question left unanswered as both sides are Islamic.

Music is the universal thread that binds human beings is the essence of *Khuda Ke Liye*. The film is soaked with every kind of music. The high point of the film comes when Mansoor begins to sing in his music class and the rest, comprised of students from across the world join in spontaneously with their instruments, their voices, their